



The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 35

Issue 2 June

Article 21

2008

The State after Statism: New State Activities in the Age of Liberalization. Jonah D. Levy, Editor.

James Midgley

University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Midgley, James (2008) "*The State after Statism: New State Activities in the Age of Liberalization.* Jonah D. Levy, Editor.," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 35 : Iss. 2 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss2/21>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



international arena, linking them to normative standards established by the international community in 1948. Although the United States played a leading role in promoting human rights, successive governments have focused on civil and political rather than social and economic rights. In an interesting chapter, he compares the United States with other Western countries and concludes that despite the American government's rhetoric about human rights, its performance in the area of social and economic rights has been dismal.

This is a lively and interesting book which addresses social policy debates from a novel perspective. Although the concept of social rights, which was introduced by T. H. Marshall in the 1950s, is well known in social policy circles in the United States, the wider discourse of human rights is seldom invoked. By examining a major social policy innovation in the United States in the context of international human rights discourse, the author has made a major contribution which will hopefully stimulate a great deal of further discussion.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley

Jonah D. Levy, Editor. *The State after Statism: New State Activities in the Age of Liberalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006. \$55.00 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

Widely held assumptions about the positive and benevolent role of the state in social welfare, which prevailed for most of the 20th century, have been seriously challenged over the last two decades. With the ascendancy of market liberal ideas during this time, it is no longer generally accepted that governments should maintain extensive social welfare programs designed to meet social needs and promote the well-being of citizens. Collective notions have been replaced with a far greater emphasis on personal responsibility, the utilization of market provision and more reliance on the family, informal support networks and the voluntary sector.

Although these trends suggest that governments now exercise limited influence over economic and social policy, this

intriguing book suggests that rumors about the demise of the state are premature. Contrary to widely held beliefs, it contends that the governments of the Western countries have not shrunk in size or become passive and indifferent, but that they continue to exert a powerful influence on both economic and social affairs. However, there has been a significant change in the way governments intervene. For most of the 20th century, Western governments employed Keynesian economic ideas or resorted to corporatist agreements to regulate and direct the market economy. This approach, which sought to control the market, has since been replaced by an approach that seeks to foster and support market activities. As the editor points out in an interesting introductory and concluding analysis, the state in Western society is now actively engaged in promoting marketization. However, it does so in different ways in different societies. In countries with strong corporatist and statist traditions, increased marketization has been accompanied by policies that maintain social welfare programs and promote employment. Although this commitment is not as strong in liberal societies, even here social programs have not been abandoned but reshaped to support marketization largely through promoting work.

The central theme of this book is explored in several case studies of state activism in the Western countries. These focus on the changes that have taken place in Britain, the Netherlands, France, Japan, Germany and the United States over recent decades. Although somewhat uneven, these chapters provide useful insights into the way governments today are managing their economies and supporting marketization to expand competition both domestically and internationally and to make labor regulation and social programs more employment friendly. The chapters on corporatist adjustment in the Netherlands in Germany, state policy in France and Japan and the promotion of women's employment in the Western countries are particularly insightful and important. The book makes a major contribution to current debates about the role of the state in social welfare and deserves to be widely consulted.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley